

Notes from the District 6 Community Meeting
10-Ten year Strategy to End Homelessness
City of Long Beach

Date: Monday November 07, 2005
Time: 5:30 –7:30 PM
Location: St. Mary's Hospital – Parr Building
1055 Linden Ave. City of Long Beach, 6th District (Laura Richardson,
Council Member)

Opening Remarks:

Don went over speaker cards and explained how the 2 Part discussion would take place today.

Don opened by explaining the "10 yr strategy". Don explained the forms on the table and encouraged any and all input from the audience is encouraged be it today or during the weeks to come. All input is compiled and is sent to the Steering Committee via the working group. The steering Committee then forwards the information to City Council.

Don explained the goal of the Focus Group is to identify ISSUES, SOLUTIONS & STRATEGIES.

Don presented background information on the University of Pennsylvania study conducted in New York. The study included about 5,000 homeless individuals. The study discovered the city saved \$16,000 by putting the homeless directly into housing.

The areas of focus across the country are PREVENTION...catching it before it goes that far, CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS...those individuals who are disabled and homeless for over a year or have experienced homelessness 4 times or more over 3 years, TRANSITIONAL HOUSING... individuals that are homeless for a brief period due to lost jobs or rent increasing etc. HOUSING FIRST MODEL...getting off the street into homes, COORDINATED CASE MANAGEMENT...wrap around services to help client maintain their stability.

The goals are to 1. Reduce the number of Homeless. 2. Increase the number of permanent housing. 3. Reduce length of Homeless episodes. 4. Provide Community based services.

Don explained we need to think creatively about old problems "Outside the box thinking". No idea is a bad idea. All ideas need to come to the table.

Summary of Public Comments:

Pat: stated that she is familiar with the structure of Long Beach. How are we going to be able to get any commitment from the City? We are doing a lot of work in these meetings but if the City does not work on the structural issues then we will not be able to

implement all this and all this work is wasted. How do we get the City Council to listen and hear we have a problem? To me we need to start there.

Christina: Commented that we have a Mayoral race coming up. Maybe we need to get some kind of presentation together and find someone who will present it. We can at least ask to have it presented as a platform item.

Sue: stated each of the [Mayoral] candidates could then get a feel from the people here about how big the problem is.

Christine: commented that she thinks it's important they [city council] hear about things that have slipped through the cracks. They have to listen then hear some of the options.

Don: stated he thinks there is more attention going to the Homelessness issues, but certainly it is good to get more attention drawn to this. We have had several Council Members at these meetings.

Sandy: Explained that we all know there is a problem... but because it is so big and there are so many needs there seems there is not be enough money to address all the specific needs.

Don: explained other communities are in agreement that we do not want homelessness. Many have focused on homeless prevention because too many times we wait to address the problems until after the client is homeless. Other communities focus on the chronic homeless and transitional homeless.

Summary of Discussion:

Don explained studies have found the longer a person remains homeless the longer they stay there. About 1/4 of resources are spent towards this type of homelessness.

Wrap-around services - instead of client going all over for services the services coming into their homes. All their services are coordinated in one location. The hope is this will lead to greater success.

Homeless Prevention - Pasadena has the "Good Neighbor" strategy. They have a plan where people in the neighborhoods stay on watch so to speak for signs of neighbors needing help. Maybe mail laying on ground or lawns not mowed...then they go to help them with whatever the needs are and direct them to the services available.

Marion: stated we also need to make sure people are making a living wage. Whether it is city wide, state wide or federal the wage needs to fit the neighborhood price.

Pat: commented affordable housing needs to be made available also. Even more subsidized homes are needed.

Don: asked how do we go about ensuring there is enough housing?

Jay: stated we need to build upward, as high as they can go.

Marion: commented a shift in attitudes towards density. Get over the thinking we need "x" amount of space per building. What's wrong with building up?

Pat: explained she thinks we need to have more mixed usage. The businesses need to have more housing on top of them, but we cannot only build in the ghetto either.

Don: clarified we are talking about mixed income and mixed generations to avoid "ghetto".

Marion: explained we also have the assumption that when people get their apartments they know how to keep them up. Many do not know how to keep their homes nice looking. But we need to educate them...teach them life skills.

Pat: commented "Habitat For Humanity" does do that. They teach their owners life skills before they move in.

Don: asked what are some ways to prevent homelessness?

Jay: replied provide Universal Health Care and interest free debt assistance.

Christine: stated the IRS does have a program that helps people with banking account fee's etc. use wrap around services to avoid debt problems.

Jay: stated make homes cheaper to own

Marion: commented we need to work with the Banks. They really need to be made aware of the problems and maybe then they can step up to the plate and help in some fashion with our problems.

Pat: added we need to make Agencies want to get involved. One way to do that is to make sure we send them good vigilant clients who will be good customers.

Marion: explained she likes the "Neighborhood Watch" affect. Neighbor has some problems the "watch" staff steps in to help.

Jack: asked is there a way a large amount of people can get free health insurance? Could the city get coverage for their community members the way large companies have coverage? Maybe we need to get this on the table since there is so much money that often goes to medical expenses when someone lacks medical insurance.

Don: stated there are many strategies that focus on the Housing First model. They have "Safe Havens", providing a place with very few rules. They have the expectation of no

violence or drugs but more time spent into coaxing them into wanting to help themselves. Some are using SRO's, smaller living areas.

Pat: stated some of those we do not have codes for. We need to change the zoning for those types of homes.

Jay: asked what is the difference between SRO and studios?

Don: explained SRO's don't necessarily have their own kitchen or bathroom. It may be shared.

Jack: asked in Housing First are services brought to the home? Someone with drug issues or disabilities would then have services come to their place, removing a barrier.

Pat: stated making sure people are taking their medication needs to be a part of that service as well. It is really important that people who need to be on meds are taking them.

Don: Explained that Philadelphia is using the model where they go out and reach the homeless on the streets. They offer them services 3 times and if they do not accept services and get off the streets it becomes a criminal issue. The law then gets involved.

Pat: asked how is that funded?

Don: replied through Local resources...State and Federal Housing. Sober Living is part of the mix. A lot of money is put towards trying to build more housing. HUD is also putting money towards the cause.

Pat: stated we really need to find out where all the money is. Identify the finding and resources then take advantage of it.

Marion: stated 8 Plex, 4 Plex, 16 Plex whatever it is there has to be a team to go into the homes. We need scattered sites and more subsidized housing.

Christine: explained the Redevelopment agency controls 50% of Long Beach. Perhaps they can get some consultation and have a better idea of how to design Long Beach to make it greater and more useful.

Marion: commented we also need to work on overcoming the mistrust of Government and/or private groups. A lot of questions are asked about where is the money going. More education maybe will break the mistrust many have as to where funds are going or not going. But the mistrust has to be broken.

Pat: stated many think homelessness is an industry. They think we are making money off of the homeless.

Marion: added many people think it's not as big of a problem as it really is. They live in a nice house and it doesn't affect them until maybe they get hit with medical bills they can't pay.

Jay: asked what are the numbers of homeless in Long Beach?

Susan: replied 4475 in Long Beach. We figure about 17,900 yearly in a community of 480,000 people. This figure does not count the homeless living in cars or motels. Then there are the people who have left Long Beach and are in shelters elsewhere.

Marion: commented we have multiple families living together. They aren't counted in the homeless numbers either but are crammed into houses or living in garages. There's not just 4475 homeless in Long Beach...our definitions and numbers need to be expanded. Our vision needs to expand. We could have easily have another 1,500 in Long Beach in others homes, garages and cars.

Susan: explained people have to move out of their homes because the rent keeps jumping. Many people have several families jammed into a two-bedroom home. The City looks at this as a code problem but they need to deal with it from a different angle.

Don: stated there are Faith based communities that adopt families, help pay their bills and really find creative ways to keep them from becoming homeless.

Pat: commented sometimes it is hard to find these [homeless] people because they are too proud to admit they need help.

Don: stated maybe we need to find a way to lessen the stigma around being homeless.

Sandy: commented maybe we need to set up a drop in center for those at risk where they can go if they feel they may be reaching homelessness.

Susan: asked may I recommend a resource center too. I feel it would be a good place to have these resources available. Staffed with counselors that can help them identify if they are at risk.

Marion: stated I think employers need to be educated and trained to help identify if their employees have signs of homelessness. This might be hard to do, but even have a toll free number posted where they can call for free help if they find themselves in this situation.

Sandy: commented money management classes are very important. Help them learn how to make it [income] stretch.

Jay: stated they [the homeless] need to learn vocational training. Resume training is not the hardest part. They need to learn beyond that, the requirements for keeping a job once they are hired.

Jack: suggested perhaps advertising for such services can come along with the utility statements.

Pat: stated there is money on advertising on buses and the benches.

Tracy: commented we also can pass along more info ourselves. To people we know in need around us.

Jay: asked if I were homeless right now could I walk in to a center and get the training I need for a job?

Susan: commented there are many services are out there already if you want it and the only requirement is that you are homeless.

Sandy: stated there is a service out there that will help you pay for your school. Especially if you are disabled they will pay for all of your school. I didn't know about it until just recently. They need more advertisement.

Pat: explained many people are afraid if we advertise our services too much it will draw more homeless.

Marion: added there are some that feel if we solve "homelessness" it will draw more homeless people from other areas to Long Beach.

Don: asked any thoughts on how to bring the Housing First model?

Jack: replied is eminent domain a possibility?

Jay: added Aqua Towers are still empty. Could start there. That would show effort on the part of the City. Look deeper into all the empty buildings. I feel density is so low in Long Beach they need to use these types of buildings.

Pat: explained she feels we need to address it more with apartment owners. Get them to want to participate especially if we are working closely with our clients and teaching them how to maintain their apartments. I think under those circumstances the owners might be more willing.

Don: asked what about Coordinated Case Management, Maybe a coordinated network?

Sandy: stated she thinks people need to come together from all over to help each other organize and brain storm.

Tracy: commented one centralized location where everyone can come together to meet would be helpful.

Marion: asked what about using satellites to broadcast meetings from one place to another?

Pat: stated I think we need to expand the Multi Service Center location and concept. We need space to address all these ideas.

Marion: commented we have talked about Banks and other agencies but what about Real Estate? Somehow I think it would be good for them to be involved. They are creative in getting things done for people. They make things happen everyday. I think they could add a good balance. Government takes a long time to get active but business can make things happen quickly. We need them to harness an incentive.

Sandy: added many people think that with their real estate they can make money but if there was a nice incentive for them to want to help out the cause of Homelessness be it an incentive from city, state or government it needs to look good to draw them in.

Meeting Adjourned 7:30